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THE ANTI-SLAVERY CONFERENCE.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE BELGIAN MINISTER AT WASHINGTON,
ALFRED LE GHAI.

Now that the recent ratification of the act of Brussels by the United States has happily become an accomplished and definite fact, I feel at liberty to give the readers of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW the requested general information regarding the character and purpose of this great work.

The suppression of slavery and of the slave trade carried on in the vast and unexplored territories of Africa has been a subject of solicitude for the civilized world for many years, especially since the generous action on the part of the American hemisphere. Numerous efforts were made to extirpate the scourge, but, unfortunately, in spite of all the treaties and conventions they were, necessarily, too individual and limited in their sphere of action to hope for efficient results.

When the Berlin Conference, in 1885, had put the African organization on an international basis and consecrated the work, initiated, since 1876, by the King of Belgium, by placing him at the head of an independent State in Africa, the dark veil covering this continent was to be torn; the benefits of civilization were to penetrate it; a free commerce of all the nations was to be inaugurated; but, before all, the *slave-trade*, with all its horrors, was to disappear.

When dawn approached on the social condition of this country, when the missionaries, the explorers, the first traders, returned to present to us the thrilling picture of thousands of victims succumbing almost daily to this outrageous hunt for man, a universal cry of terror rang through the civilized world; the heart of every Christian, of every free man, swelled with pity, and a charitable and humanitarian crusade was preached everywhere. A moral obligation prevailed, in both the Old and New World, to hasten to the aid of a victimized race, to stretch out a fraternal hand to these human victims! It was felt that, before thinking of our

material interests in those countries recently opened to cupidity, we must free them from the oppressing infamous yoke. Morality demanded this; prudence advised it, to assure universal commercial security.

The touching and persevering eloquence of Cardinal Lavigerie had moved the world for several years. The philanthropic and religious societies solicited the support of their generous efforts.

King Leopold—always at the head of movements of civilization—believed, in 1889, that the time had arrived for codifying and putting into practice the sentiment that touched every heart. He convoked, in accord with England, an international conference at Brussels for the purpose of establishing a common understanding among the powers, whose isolated efforts, or aspirations, had been powerless to efficiently prevent the horrors of the slave trade in Africa.

The enterprise was noble and generous, but gigantic and beset with great difficulties. There was a general accord as to the usefulness and necessity of the great aim, but a thousand obstacles obstructed the path.

England had outlawed the slave trade in 1807, and never ceased promoting its total abolition.

But it required nearly a century to convince the powers of the necessity of accord and of subordinating, in this matter, all other considerations to that of the welfare of an entire race. More than a hundred treaties were concluded for this purpose among the European, American and Asiatic powers. But what opposition had to be overcome, what interests to be conciliated, to obtain any action! The Congress of Vienna (1815) and of Verona (1822), the treaty of the Five Allied Powers (1841), with long negotiations concerning the right of search; the English treaties with the Sultan of Zanzibar (1873), with Egypt (1877), with the Ottoman Empire (1880), and, finally, the General Act of Berlin (1884-5), mark the stages of this great diplomatic work pursued concomitant with enfranchisement, the most memorable epochs of which are the years 1833 in England, 1848 in France, 1865 in the United States, and 1887 in Brazil.

The mandate of the Conference revealed in many respects a unique character, owing to the wide scope of its object, the age and diversity of acts and habits to be revised, the number of the powers interested, and, finally, the purpose in view. The legis-

lation demanded in this Conference was not to be restricted to a single country, nor even to a group of States, but to the greater part of an immense continent, to a territory equivalent to twice the surface of Europe, increased by a large maritime zone in the Indian Ocean. It was to assist, in this vast area, a population of more than 125,000,000 of people subject to barbarities during hundreds of years.

The Conference was enabled to meet at Brussels on the 18th of November, 1889, in spite of political, economic, moral, and religious preoccupations manifested beforehand. Seventeen Powers were represented there, viz. : Germany, Austro-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, the Independent Congo State, the United States of America, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Sweden and Norway, Turkey and Zanzibar.

The Conference had been able to assemble, because it posed before the civilized world on a question of honor to be determined whenever raised, and because, when the Powers had been convoked, it had been agreed upon that all discussion foreign to slavery and slave trade should be excluded from its programme, especially the political or territorial questions. The Powers were not to discuss their possessions or protectorates in Africa, nor to sanction them mutually.

It is of the greatest importance to declare that this Assembly has never departed from this programme during its protracted and intricate discussions, and that the General Act resulting therefrom is exclusively limited to the suppression of the slave trade and the restriction of the use of alcohol. The protocols III., IV. and XI. prove this, and this is the reason why all the Powers—even those possessing nothing in Africa and foreign to the politics of that continent—have been able to take part in the Conference and to ratify its conclusions. They understood, then, that they had not to do anything there—nor did they—but to co-operate in a purely humanitarian work, in the repression of revolting atrocities no longer to be tolerated in regions opening to free commerce.

The labors of the Conference continued from November 18, 1889, to July 2, 1890, but they terminated entirely only in April, 1891, by the complete understanding of all the Powers interested in reference to the means of carrying out their decisions.

The Conference at Brussels closed its work by resuming its decisions in a *General Act* signed by the representatives of all the powers on July 2, 1890. It comprises one hundred articles divided in seven chapters. This General Act is completed by a *Declaration*, signed on the same day, furnishing (as will be seen later) to the powers having possessions in the zone exposed to the slave trade the means of carrying out the engagements entered into by signing the General Act.

The Conference, in elaborating its work, rigorously followed the march of the slave trade for the purpose of repressing it in every one of its features. It directs itself from the beginning, therefore, to the very heart of Africa, to the regions where the negroes are captured ; it will then follow the transports of slaves toward the coasts and on the sea, to regulate there the action of the cruisers.

The Conference determined upon a number of means of action to protect the victims and punish the guilty. Such are the creation of offices of control, of liberation, and publicity ; the regulation of the trade in spirituous liquors and arms ; the creation of financial resources for facilitating the action of the governments on the territory where the traffic is particularly to be suppressed.

I shall not attempt to give here, even in a résumé, the description of all the articles of the General Act of Brussels. Those readers who want to examine them will find the English text in "Report 3,134" House of Representatives, Fifty-first Congress : "Slave Trade in Africa." *

Chapters I. and II. treat of the suppression of the slave trade in the localities of its origin and of the measures to be taken for the supervision of the roads taken by the caravans.

Chapter III. treats of an intricate point which gave rise to long discussions. It defines the general principles and the procedure for suppressing the slave trade on the sea, to the regulation of which matter forty-two articles are devoted. The right of search exists only for the powers bound by treaties in this respect. If the provisions of the General Act for repression on land and the supervision of the embarkations are fully carried out, this right is destined to lead, in a short time, to a new and universal administration regulating the concession of the flag and the verification

* Peuvent être également consultés avec intérêt les 2 volumes déposés à la Conférence, sur la traite des esclaves en Afrique et les actes internationaux y relatifs.
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of the papers on board. Three principles will henceforward guide the intervention of the squadrons. Their supervision is restricted to a circumscribed zone of the eastern coast of Africa ; it extends only to the vessels of less than 500 tons' capacity ; the right of asylum, finally, is absolute for slaves, at least on board of the men-of-war.

Chapter VI. does not, apparently, apply directly to the purposes of the Conference, but it is nevertheless considered as a means of exercising a great influence on customs, morals, and, consequently, on civilization in general. It is admitted everywhere—and in the United States perhaps more than elsewhere—that the abuse of alcoholic beverages is the worst of destructive agencies.

The aim of the Conference, after having suppressed the odious traffic in slaves, was to bring, by pacific benefits, civilization to these unfortunate people, to elevate, gradually, their moral and intellectual level. The black race should neither be conquered, nor subjugated, but liberated, and called upon to participate with the white race in all the labors and privileges of free men. The Conference had, in order to reach this aim, to occupy itself carefully with the alcohol question. Importation, sale, and manufacture of spirituous liquors are, henceforth, totally forbidden in an immense zone, that from the 20th degree of north latitude to the 22d degree of south latitude.

This is a great triumph for the cause of civilization, and the representatives of the United States at the Conference have greatly contributed to it by their insisting upon absolute prohibition. The Conference was, however, compelled to make concessions for certain points of the African territory where the use of and commerce in spirituous liquors already exist, so that the protestations of countries dealing in alcoholic beverages in Africa had to be taken into account. A right of entry for fifteen francs per hectolitre, at fifty degrees (Centigrade), has been fixed upon for those limited regions ; an equal right of excise has been imposed on manufacture. This tax may be increased to twenty-five francs after three years, representing about 100 per cent. of value. This tax is very high when compared with the buying capacity and the means of those who will have to pay for it. The greatest possible satisfaction has thus been afforded by the Conference to the desires expressed by the plenipotentiaries of the United States.

The General Act of the Conference formulates, in establishing the general system of the work, the engagements acceded to by the independent States of Africa, or those of Europe having possessions there, for the purpose of attaining the humanitarian end generally pursued by all the powers. But these engagements required pretty heavy charges, duties, and responsibilities for certain states, for the benefit of all; the question was raised then in what manner these new expenses could be met.

The situation was particularly serious for the independent Congo State, which, owing to its geographical position, will have to support much more considerable charges than the others for combating the slave trade, it having been the focus of the slave trade for centuries. Owing to its being of a quite recent creation, it incurs greater obligations and has more limited resources than other countries which, being merely colonies, dispose of the resources of the mother land.

The delegates of the Congo State were thus forced to declare frankly in the Conference that their government—while enthusiastically accepting all the stipulations of the General Act—was not in a position to carry out the regulations, if financial measures were not adopted for supplying the means. The Conference recognized, unanimously, that, in consequence of the new obligations and charges imposed on the countries in the conventional basin of the Congo, it was just and necessary to authorize them (by revising Article IV. of the Act of Berlin in 1885) to impose duties on the importation of foreign merchandise.

This resolution of establishing duties was made the subject of a separate act, on the demand of the United States Government, which, not having adhered to the Act of Berlin, could not take part in the revision. It was signed on July 2, 1890, at the time when the General Act was signed by all the powers, except Holland, which did so afterward. This resolution was named the *Declaration of Brussels*, and forms an inseparable annex to the General Act, with the expectation that whoever desired the result should grant the means of obtaining it.

That declaration authorized the collection of very limited duties, not above 10 per cent. ad valorem, on merchandise at the port of importation, spirituous liquors being regulated by the special provisions spoken of above.

But the declaration was not, in itself, a definite act ; it had merely adopted a principle and fixed a maximum of 10 per cent. Customs tariffs had to be established in mutual accord on this basis. These tariffs have been definitely fixed upon—December 22, 1890, and February 9, 1891—both for the countries of the eastern and those of the western coasts of the conventional basin of the Congo. An examination of these tariffs shows that the maximum of 10 per cent. authorized by the Conference is stipulated for arms and munitions only ; also that many articles are free of entry, and that as to the remainder the duty amounts only to from 3 to 6 per cent.

The United States, being the only state represented at this Conference that did not need a revision of the Act of Berlin, accorded the principle of establishing duties by signing, on January 24, 1891, a treaty of commerce with the independent Congo State. It obtains thereby the treatment of the most favored nations in its largest sense.

Such are the important advantages assured by the United States in all the states of the conventional basin of the Congo, in addition to its participation in the civilizing and humanitarian work of the Conference.

The sovereign king of the Congo State has, in consideration of the new tariffs, decreed the diminution of direct taxes and export duties ; he has also taken liberal measures with a view of encouraging commercial transactions, to the benefit of all the nations.

I cannot refrain from pointing to the astonishing manner—unprecedented in the history of colonization—in which the work of civilization has been acknowledged and developed in the Congo, in consequence of the great insight, perseverance, and magnanimous disinterestedness of King Leopold.

If civilization penetrates rapidly in the Congo, it is due to the benefits of peace, commerce, and education, without the aid of iron, fire, or alcohol, and without shedding a drop of blood, except for the purpose of saving slaves from infamous kidnappers, and never with the intention of subjugating the indigenous race. The assured and grateful populations group themselves quickly around European posts advancing from region to region and forming centres which are to become cities ; 15,000 kilometres of navigable ways have already been opened and used by a commercial fleet. The route of the caravans turning

around the cataracts will soon be replaced by the railroad already being built. Modern and liberal institutions pervade the land and open it to the commercial rivalry of all the nations. Nothing of all this was to be seen six years ago, when the state was founded and intrusted to the sovereign direction of King Leopold.

The United States has always favored the young state; its sympathy was manifested at every opportunity in viewing the work of the great king in opening up the black continent to civilization. May the moral support given by the United States to the opening of these distant regions be compensated by the advantages it will not fail to obtain there in a population of more than fifty millions of inhabitants as an outlet to its coming exuberance of production !

The two acts of Brussels are now ratified by all the governments. These ratifications have been deposited at Brussels, except that of Portugal, which has not yet been able to present these acts to its Parliament, and obtained a delay up to April 2 for depositing its ratification.

The French Chambers have approved the General Act only, with certain restrictions. They eliminated, provisionally, the articles relating to the right of search, leaving them for an ulterior subject of arrangement between the powers interested. This temporary reservation (accepted by all the other signatory powers) does not modify in any way the provisions of the General Act, since they remain applicable to the other contracting parties in their primitive form.

The United States Senate has approved the treaty of January 24, 1891, and the General Act of Brussels, but it added the following proviso, not bearing on any special point of the act : " Resolved, further, as a part of this act of ratification, that the United States, not having in African territory any possessions or protectorates, hereby disclaims any intention, in adhering to this treaty, to declare any interest in such possessions or protectorates established by other powers, or any approval of the wisdom, expediency, or lawfulness thereof, and does not join in any expression in the treaty which might be construed as such a declaration."

The powers, having formally stipulated before meeting in conference that all ideas of sanctioning their possessions or protectorates should be excluded, have been able to accept with

satisfaction the great reserve of the United States against a danger imaginary, and eliminated beforehand ; and this reserve has been inserted in the protocol of the ratifications signed at Brussels on the 2d day of February, 1892.

Although traditional policy made the avoidance of any interference in political questions abroad with the European powers incumbent on the United States, yet their generous and liberal aspirations, their glorious antecedents, and even the blood they shed for the enfranchisement of oppressed races, inspired them with the desire and moral duty to join in the purely humanitarian act of the Brussels Conference.

The illustrious President of the republic, and the eminent statesman at present directing the foreign affairs of the country, understood from the beginning, with a prudent and patriotic insight, that the great American republic could not remain a stranger to this general uprising of the civilized world against the last horrors of barbarism. They sent skilled and zealous plenipotentiaries to the Conference, who strove for more than a year, with remarkable ability, to conciliate the interests and dignity of their country with the aims pursued in common by all the powers.

The names of President Harrison, of Blaine, Terrell, Sanford, Tree, and Sherman, will remain connected with the noblest, most generous, and philanthropic work of our century.

When a new era dawns on suffering humanity, and when the Conference at Brussels has done its work faithfully, it is but just to attribute a great part of its merits to the eminent statesman who presided over it and directed the long and arduous work with an ability and tact greatly appreciated by the representatives of all the powers, and who was always able to meet the many difficulties encountered in every stage of the proceedings.

Baron Lambermont many times saved the work of the Conference, as it became involved in serious difficulties. He displayed great subtlety, insight, prudence, and patience during those memorable debates, where so many divergent interests, diverse doctrines, inveterate prejudices, contended, and where it was so earnestly sought to conciliate the moral integrity and interest of modern civilization with the dignity, self-love, ambition, and material interests of the powers. The protracted and arduous negotiations leading to the ratification of the acts of Brussels by all the powers, in which he was the guide and con-

stant intermediary, were to him a new field of hard work, in which he displayed the high qualities that had won for him long ago a universal reputation as one of the most eminent statesmen of our times.

The General Act of Brussels has been resolved upon in the cause of a supreme interest of humanity and justice. It is the expiation of the gloomy errors of past centuries, a renewed affirmation of the principle of freedom of all men; it is, above all, a promise of material and moral civilization for the unfortunate African population.

Allow me to say here, in conclusion, that Belgium is proud of her King, who has so nobly initiated, pursued, and accomplished such a work, and that she is grateful to those powers which honored her by signing in her capital an act which promises such gratifying consequences for coming times.

A. LE GHAI.